



## Brazil

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 3,287,673 square miles, and its population is approximately 182 million. Nearly all major religions and religious organizations are present in the country. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholic, although only a small percentage regularly attend Mass. Approximately 15 percent of the population is Protestant, an estimated 85 percent of who are Pentecostal or evangelical. Evangelical churches have grown rapidly and have challenged the traditional dominance of the Catholic Church. Denominations include the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists account for most of the remaining Protestants and are centered in the south, where the majority of German and northern European immigrants concentrated during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IGBE) counted approximately 427,000 adherents of "Buddhism and other oriental religions." Shintoism is practiced to a limited degree in the Japanese-Brazilian community. There were 27,239 Muslims (a figure that probably undercounts the actual total), 39,840 practitioners of Spiritualism, 10,723 adherents of indigenous traditions, and 2,979 Hindus. An estimated 7 percent did not practice any religion. Approximately 384,000 participants did not respond to the census.

Followers of African and syncretistic religions such as Candomble, Xango, Macumba, and Umbanda constitute an estimated 4 percent of the population. Candomble is the predominant traditional African religion practiced among Afro Brazilians. It centers on the worship of African deities brought to the country as a result of the slave trade. Syncretistic forms of African religions that developed in the country include Xango and Macumba, which to varying degrees combine and identify indigenous animist beliefs and Catholic saints with African deities. The capital of Bahia State, Salvador, where most African slaves arrived in the country, is considered the center of Candomble and other traditional African religions. As a result of internal migration during the 20th century, Afro-Brazilian and syncretistic religions have spread throughout the country.

Followers of spiritism, mainly Kardecists--adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century--constitute approximately 1.3 percent of the population, with 2,337,432 followers, according to the IGBE.

Leaders of the Muslim community estimate that there are between 700,000 and 3 million Muslims, with the lower figure representing those who actively practice their religion, while the higher estimate would include also nominal members. These figures are much higher than the 27,239 Muslims reported in the 2000 census. Muslim leaders have never taken a formal count of the number of Muslims; however, they believe that the official census greatly underestimated the size of their community. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt who arrived during the past 25 years. A recent trend has been the increase in conversions to Islam among non-Arab citizens. There are approximately 55 mosques and Muslim religious centers.

Approximately 101,062 citizens identify themselves as Jewish. There are an estimated 45,000 Jews in Rio de Janeiro and

approximately 29,000 in Sao Paulo. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

The following religious holy days are observed as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen ("Carmo"), Assumption Day, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals Day, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and several evangelical organizations, operate freely throughout the country. The Institute for Religious Studies indicates that there are 2,981 foreign Protestant missionaries and approximately 3,000 foreign Catholic priests in the country.

## Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There are no registration requirements for religions or religious groups. There is no favored or state religion, although the Government maintains a concordat with the Vatican. All faiths are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. There is a general provision for access to religious services and counsel in all civil and military establishments. The law prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government restricts the access of nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves and requires visitors to seek permission from the National Indian Foundation to enter official indigenous areas.

In August 2004, President Lula signed a petition drafted by the World Jewish Congress to condemn anti-Semitism and call for the U.N. General Assembly to adopt a resolution to denounce anti-Jewish acts. This event marked the first time for a Brazilian president to sign an official declaration against anti-Semitism.

The law makes it illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell books that promote anti-Semitism or racism. The law enables courts to fine or imprison anyone who displays, distributes, or broadcasts anti-Semitic or racist paraphernalia. The law mandates a 2- to 5-year prison term for violators.

### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

## Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although a natural rivalry exists among various religious groups vying for greater numbers of adherents. The influence of evangelical churches is growing. There is no national ecumenical movement. The National Commission for Religious Dialogue brings together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders.

Anti-Semitism is rare; however, there are signs of increasing violence against Jewish persons. Leaders in the Jewish community expressed concern over the continued appearance of anti-Semitic material on Internet web sites compiled by neo-Nazi and "skinhead" groups. There were no reports of violent incidents directed at Jews, although there were reports of anti-Semitic graffiti, harassment, vandalism, and threats via telephone and e-mail.

On May 8, 2005, three "skinheads" were arrested and charged with attempted murder, gang formation, and racism for attacking three Jewish students in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State; a fourth person was arrested on May 18. At the end of the

period covered by this report, the four suspects were in jail and awaiting trial. Police found flags, banners, books, CDs, and other Nazi paraphernalia in the homes of the four men. Police have ordered the preventive arrests of four additional gang members suspected of participating in the beatings.

In October 2004, the Congregation Beth Jacob Synagogue in Campinas, Sao Paulo State, was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti, including swastikas and the phrase, in English, "kill all jewish." The Campinas city council passed a motion denouncing the act. The police investigation into the incident was closed due to a lack of evidence.

In February 2004, anti-Semitic graffiti was found in a bathroom at Pontifica Universidade Catolica in Rio de Janeiro state (PUC-RJ); six students were under police investigation. PUC-RJ has approximately 10,000 students, 5 percent of whom are Jewish.

No further information was available on the 2003 Supreme Court decision to uphold a 1996 Rio Grande do Sul state court conviction of editor Siegfried Ellwanger for racism. Ellwanger edited and wrote anti-Semitic books. The lower court's ruling sentenced Ellwanger to a prison term of 2 years, although this sentence was converted to 4 years of community service.

There was no reported progress in the investigation of the 2003 shooting death in Sao Paulo of the Vertero Catholic bishop.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Released on November 8, 2005

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